

Local veterans and hospitals applaud DeFazio bills to close VA loopholes

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WASHINGTON, D.C.- Representative Peter DeFazio (D-Springfield) introduced two bills that will lower health care costs for veterans, make it easier for veterans to access the Veterans Administration (VA) healthcare system, and prevent older veterans from unexpected out of pocket healthcare costs.

"If a veteran has an health emergency and calls 911, that veteran shouldn't have to worry if they are going to be stuck with that bill for their care," said DeFazio. "I have heard from a number of constituents affected by bureaucratic loopholes that unfairly burden veterans and local hospitals. This legislation will close these loopholes to ensure that the VA fulfills it's commitment to pay for the care of those who have served our country."

BACKGROUND

H.R. 4246 The VA Enrollment Act

A flaw in current law prevents the VA from paying for emergency, non-service connected care of certain veterans at non-VA hospitals. Those not covered include veterans who haven't enrolled with the VA and veterans who haven't been seen by a VA doctor in the past two years. As a result, these veterans are unfairly stuck with massive medical bills that often get passed along to local hospitals.

DeFazio had heard from local hospitals that have treated a number of veterans affected by this legislative oversight. DeFazio's legislation would expand VA eligibility to uninsured veterans and ensure that these veterans and local hospitals aren't forced to foot the bill for non-service connected health care the VA should pay for.

Mercy Medical Center in Roseburg applauded the DeFazio bill.

“We are very encouraged that Congressman DeFazio has taken a leadership role to benefit our veterans. We have had numerous conversations with the Veterans Administration and Congressional Delegates about enhancing benefits for local veterans. We are hopeful that Congress will be in agreement with Congressman DeFazio and will vote to support our veterans,” said Kelly Morgan, CEO of Mercy Medical Center .

H.R. 4245 Veterans Co-Pay Fairness Act

The VA fully covers the cost of emergency visits by uninsured veterans to non-VA hospitals. However, older uninsured veterans covered by Medicare are forced to pay out of pocket for all co-pays for an identical visit to that non-VA hospital. DeFazio’s Veterans Co-Pay Fairness Act would cover veterans’ out of pocket Medicare co-pays for such visits. Veterans should not be forced to pay out of pocket for their emergency care just because they have reached Medicare age.

“I strongly support H.R. 4245 as it eliminates Medicare co-pays for qualified veterans who seek emergency care at a non-VA facility. This care would be provided at no cost to the veterans if they could go to a VA facility, but when that is not possible, the elimination of this co-pay can make a bad situation better for the veteran and their family ,” said Director of Oregon Veterans Affairs Jim Willis

Lane County Veterans Service Officer Joseph Reiley said, **“The VA estimates that there currently are over 15,000 Lane County Veterans who are over 65 and many of these veterans rely on the VA for the majority of their health care needs. However, not all veterans can make it to a VA facility in an emergency. Sometimes they must seek care at the closest hospital and then end up with huge medical bills. In certain situations, the VA will cover these expenses, but VA rules forbid helping veterans with their portion if they have any health insurance – even Medicare. Congressman DeFazio’s bill would help fill this gap and provide piece of mind for the thousands of Lane County veterans who are over 65 and on Medicare but who utilize VA health care. No longer would they be faced with the dilemma of dropping Medicare in order to increase their chance at VA**

helping out in an emergency.□ Medicare, a benefit they pay for, would be the primary payer and the VA, a benefit they earned, would help them with the difference.”

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